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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAITI AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ ON THE TASKS AHEAD

REF: BAGHDAD 3764

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iraq, Ali Al-Mou'min, told Senior Advisor Gordon Gray November 29 that Iraq and Kuwait must move quickly -- at least on issues where they agree in principle -- to show their respective publics the benefits of strengthened bilateral ties. Al-Mou'min expressed some frustration that things had not progressed as swiftly as he had initially hoped, but underlined his determination to press ahead. In particular, he pointed to construction of housing to relocate Iraqi farmers currently in Kuwait, technical cooperation for the removal of wrecks in the Khor Abdullah, procedures to better identify Iraqi fishermen operating in waters along the border, and agreement on the conditions for the International Zone (IZ) property that will house the future Kuwaiti embassy, as areas where he hopes to see progress soon. Al-Mou'min said efforts to tackle more difficult issues such as Iraqi debt, Kuwaiti Airways' claims, and POWs would take more time. He congratulated the U.S. for the passage of the SOFA in the Iraqi Parliament earlier in the week and recommended that the U.S. and Kuwait focus on education for Iraqis -- military and otherwise -- as we move forward. Finally, he noted that current dynamics in Kuwait's domestic politics will probably delay a visit by Kuwait's Prime Minister, at least until February and perhaps later. End summary.

I'll be a Little Less Bold

¶2. (C) In a cordial meeting at the Rasheed Hotel (where he is currently operating the Kuwaiti Embassy until an IZ property is ready for occupancy), Ambassador Al-Mou'min told us he is "a little more pessimistic" than he was on his initial visit in October. It has become clear, he noted, that the speed in which he had hoped to tackle issues will not be as swift as he had hoped and, as a result, "I'll be a little less bold." His frustration was not centered on difficult issues that he recognizes will take time, but rather on those areas where there is already agreement in principle but implementation and practical follow-up has been slow. Taking a pragmatic approach, Al-Mou'min acknowledged that "we have to understand each other's limitations" but at the same time stressed that he doesn't want to waste time. What is important, he noted, is that Iraqis and Kuwaitis quickly see tangible results that show the benefits of strengthened bilateral ties.

Congrats on SOFA -- Education Should be a Focus

¶3. (C) Al-Mou'min congratulated the U.S. for the November 27 passage of the SOFA by the Iraqi Parliament, adding that

the U.S. "deserves credit for not pushing them into a corner." He agreed that debate on and passage of the SOFA was a real test of Iraq's evolving democracy and that a continued U.S. presence in Iraq is needed to "keep them in line and make sure they're successful." Looking ahead, Al-Mou'min encouraged the U.S. to "be like the Brits and focus on education -- staff college, cadets, etc." He noted that Kuwait would be looking for ways to invest in education in Iraq as well but did not offer any details.

Relocation of Iraqi Farmers from Kuwait

14. (C) In response to Gray's question on which issue he wants to tackle first, Al-Mou'min pointed to the relocation to Iraq of several hundred Iraqi farmers currently on the Qto Iraq of several hundred Iraqi farmers currently on the Kuwait side of the border. He characterized this as the simplest issue to resolve given both sides have agreed that it needs to be done and Kuwait has allocated the necessary funds to begin construction. All that is needed is a GOI decision identifying the parcel of land on which to build this new community -- something that the GOK has been waiting for some time. He stressed that there is no policy disagreement at all -- its just a matter of the GOI "telling us where and we'll build." (Note: In a November 30 meeting with Gray, Basra Governor Wa'ili confirmed that his office has drawn the necessary documents for the Basra governate to provide land near Umm Qasr/Camp Bucca for the housing unit, school and mosque. Wa'ili said he had discussed this project with Foreign Minister Zebari and Deputy Foreign Minister Haj Hamoud and would again send a copy of the proposed agreement

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to the MFA, after which the MFA will coordinate with the Ministry of Municipalities on next steps. End note.)

Wreck Removal/Sea Border Survey -- Still Waiting for the MoU

15. (C) Al-Mou'min confirmed reftel information that the GOI has yet to provide the GOK with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on wreck removal in the Khor Abdullah. Gray noted that the U.S. has been pressing the GOI on this issue and will continue to encourage cooperation between both countries' navies. Al-Mou'min said "my understanding is that our navy and theirs came up with a good plan" but added that several issues have arisen to complicate the situation. The Iraqis have requested encrypted communications sets and Iraqi Vice President Hashimi has linked the issue to instances of alleged Kuwaiti Navy mistreatment of Iraqi fishermen operating in the border area. (Note: Al-Mou'min did not provide any more details on this) On the latter, Al-Mou'min suggested Iraq should license its fishermen so that Kuwaiti naval patrols can more easily identify them from other craft with less benign intentions.

Kuwaiti Embassy

16. (C) On the status of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Baghdad, Al-Mou'min said that he hopes to come to agreement with the MFA during this visit on the specific conditions related to the IZ property that has been identified. He said that in a recent meeting he had with Foreign Minister Zebari, Zebari told the MFA officers handling the embassy issue to "give them (i.e., the Kuwaitis) everything they want." He noted that the villas the MFA has offered Kuwait will need extensive work ("the ones the UAE got are in much better shape") and the sooner they can agree on terms, the sooner they can begin renovations that will be needed before they can move in.

¶7. (C) Al-Mou'min acknowledged that other issues -- particularly Iraqi debt, the Kuwaiti Airways issue and POWs -- could take time to resolve. On debt, he said "I will go around, see what we can do and try to convince the Iraqis that blaming will not get us anywhere." He noted that unlike other issues, resolution of the debt issue will require Kuwaiti parliamentary approval. On POWs, Al-Mou'min (who participated in the recent Tripartite Commission meeting) commented in frustration that "our Iraqi brothers don't seem to understand that it is their duty to look for our POWs." Finally, on Kuwaiti Airways' claims against Iraqi Airways, Al-Mou'min said the issue "could be solved overnight" but held no illusions it would. He noted that the GOK intends to privatize Kuwaiti Airways and resolving claims with Iraq is tied to that.

PM Visit -- Probably Not Soon

¶8. (C) Turning briefly to the status of plans for a visit to Baghdad by Kuwait's Prime Minister, Al-Mou'min noted that the current political crisis in Kuwait will probably delay it. The political "arm wrestling" in Kuwait will continue at least until February, Al-Mou'min predicted. The Amir will not consider accepting the government's resignation until after the late January Arab League economic summit in Kuwait and "the guys running Parliament show no signs of backing down."

Comment

¶9. (C) Despite his frustrations, Ambassador Al-Mou'min remains positive about the potential for strengthening Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations and appreciative of USG assistance to that end. While not forgetting recent painful chapters in the two countries' relationship, his pragmatic approach seeking "quick wins" where they are possible is well suited to the political moment. We will continue pressing the GOI to reciprocate -- by finally naming an Iraqi Ambassador to Kuwait, carrying through with the promised MOU on the Khor Abdullah, and other steps -- and stress to the GOI that it must not let momentum slip away. End comment.
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